



Legislation Text

File #: HCC-157-FY21, **Version:** 1

Submitted by: Schaible
Submitting Department: Legislative
Agenda Section: Discussion

Item Title:
Animal Welfare and Community Safety Act

Suggested Action:

I move that the Mayor and Council direct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance amending Chapter 52 of the Hyattsville Charter and Code to include the following:

Definitions

"Bite"

A puncture or tear of the skin.

"City Agent"

City of Hyattsville person or persons responsible for implementing and responding to animal control regulations contained in Chapter 52.

"Dangerous Animal"

A "Dangerous Animal" is a designation given by Prince Georges County Animal Services Division for animals who have a history of aggressive behavior. "Dangerous Animals" have restrictions placed upon them by the County, which can include a confinement order.

"PGCASD"

Prince George's County Animal Services Division

"Public Nuisance Category 1"

"Public Nuisance Category 1" violations include excessive, continuous, or untimely barking, howling, or making of other noises, and defecating on property other than that of the owner without the defecation being cleaned up immediately.

"Public Nuisance Category 2"

"Public Nuisance Category 2" violations occur when a dog is off leash in public spaces or trespassing on private property.

"Public Threat Category 1"

"Public Threat Category 1" violations occur when an animal without provocation engages in threatening and menacing behaviors including growling, charging at, and snapping at humans or animals.

"Public Threat Category 2"

"Public Threat Category 2" violations occur when an animal without provocation (i) inflicts injury on a human on private or public property; (ii) kills, "bites", or attacks an animal.

"Protocol" (also called "Standard Response Protocol")

Tool developed by City to guide appropriate responses in implementing and responding to animal control regulations contained in Chapter 52.

"Severe Weather"

Severe weather is temperatures below 40 and above 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Tethering"

Attaching a dog to a stationary object or pulley run by means of a chain, rope, tether, cable, or similar restraint. Tethering does not include the use of a leash to walk a dog.

City Code Chapter 52 Implementation

Unless and until the City of Hyattsville hires a dedicated Animal Warden, The City shall designate a City Agent or City Agents for municipal implementation of Chapter 52, including amendments to Chapter 52 specified in this Motion. Possible City Agent(s) include staff from the Hyattsville Police Department or Office of Code Compliance.

The City shall, on its website, specify who the City Agent(s) are and how to contact them. This shall occur within 60 days of the passage of this motion.

Animal Welfare

Chapter 52 shall be amended to include:

*** Tethering of Dogs - Restrictions on**

Animal behaviorists have warned that unattended tethered dogs are a risk to themselves and to communities. (See Definitions for “tethering.”) Long-term tethered dogs can become stressed, territorial, and aggressive. They can also engage in self-harming behavior.

Unattended tethering of a dog longer than one cumulative hour in a 24-hour period is prohibited.

Tethering during severe weather (temperatures below 40 and above 90 degrees) is prohibited. (See Definitions.)

*** Severe Weather - Restrictions on Exposure to**

Many jurisdictions are recognizing the danger to companion animals by protracted exposure to severe weather and are creating laws to improve animal welfare requirements.

Severe weather restrictions shall include a prohibition on leaving an animal outdoors without human accompaniment or adequate shelter for more than 15 minutes during periods of severe weather (temperatures below 40 and above 90 degrees).

Violations of the severe weather ordinance shall receive a written warning for the first violation and require a **mandatory** citation for subsequent violations by the City to the owner, pursuant to Section 9 of Code Chapter 52.

Animal Behavior

Current Code labels as “Public Nuisance” behavior a series of behaviors that range from barking to severe damage to people. The code shall be amended to include two categories of behavior: “Public Nuisance” and “Public Threat” behaviors.

A. Public Nuisance

Pet owners shall provide effective care and control of their animals to prevent them from becoming a “Public Nuisance”.

Depending on severity of the violation, “Public Nuisance” infractions are divided into two categories: Category 1

and Category 2.

“Public Nuisance Category 1” violations include excessive, continuous, or untimely barking, howling, or making of other noises, and defecating on property other than that of the owner without the defecation being cleaned up immediately. “Public Nuisance Category 2” violations include dogs off leash in public spaces or trespassing on private property, unattended tethering violations, or severe weather exposure violations.

B. Public Threat

Pet owners shall provide effective care and control of their animals to prevent them from becoming a “Public Threat”.

Depending on severity of the violation, “Public Threat” infractions are divided into two categories: Category 1 and Category 2.

An animal control violation shall be deemed a “Public Threat” if it harms or threatens to harm humans or animals. “Public Threat Category 1” violations occur when an animal without provocation engages in threatening and menacing behaviors including growling, charging at, and snapping at humans or animals. “Public Threat Category 2” violations occur when an animal without provocation (i) inflicts injury on a human on private or public property; (ii) kills, “bites”, or attacks an animal.

Violations - Response To

Chapter 52 shall be amended as follows:

Code violations that are a “Public Nuisance Category 1” can receive a written warning for the first violation and require a **mandatory** citation for second and subsequent violations by the City to the owner, pursuant to Section 9 of Code Chapter 52.

Code violations that are a “Public Nuisance Category 2” shall receive a written warning for the first violation and require a **mandatory** citation for subsequent violations by the City to the owner, pursuant to Section 9 of Code Chapter 52.

Code violations that are a “Public Threat Category 1” shall receive a written warning for the first violation and require a **mandatory** citation for subsequent violations by the City to the owner, pursuant to Section 9 of Code Chapter 52.

Code violations that are a “Public Threat Category 2” shall require a **mandatory** citation by the City to the owner, pursuant to Section 9 of Code Chapter 52.

A Public Safety Alert will be issued within 72 hours informing Hyattsville residents of the bite/injury incident and the address where the animal resides. Follow-up public safety alerts will be issued to keep citizens informed.

Code Conformity, Standardization, and Training

Code Conformity

Hyattsville will conduct a review of Hyattsville Police General Orders related to animal control to ensure that these General Orders (1) mirror Chapter 52 of the Hyattsville City Code as amended, and (2) align the City’s obligations to the requirements of applicable Prince George’s County Codes on animal control.

Standard Response Protocol

Hyattsville shall develop a “Standard Response Protocol” (Protocol) within ninety days to inform appropriate

responses by all “City Agents” responsible for implementing and responding to Chapter 52 and in meeting the requirements of the Prince George’s County Codes on animal control. This will include requirements to provide county reporting, issue written warning or citations, log and track data for annual reporting, and share incident in police log.

Training

Hyattsville will require appropriate training/orientation for all “City Agents” responsible for implementing or responding to animal control regulation. Hyattsville will also train newly hired personnel, within ninety days of their hire, if they will serve as a “City Agent.” This will include education on City and County animal control laws and best practices and on how to use the “Protocol.” Training standards and frequency to be determined by City Staff.

Data Collection, Sharing, Reporting

Chapter 52 exists to protect the safety of Hyattsville residents, companion animals, and City staff. Systematic data collection, sharing, and reporting is essential to evaluate how well our animal control regulations are working to protect public safety. Currently, little reliable data is available to evaluate the effectiveness of Chapter 52 in achieving its goal of public safety.

City Data

Hyattsville will record all “Public Threat” violations and written warnings occurring within City boundaries in a prompt and timely manner.

Hyattsville will report “Public Threat” violations to the Prince George’s County Animal Services Division (PGCASD) within 24 hours, which may lead PGCASD to issue a quarantine or confinement order and identify an animal as “Dangerous”.

Hyattsville will make this data available to residents via the City Website and via Crime Reports, on a bi-monthly basis.

County Data

Hyattsville personnel sometimes report “Public Threat” violations to PGCASD. Also, Hyattsville residents sometimes report these violations directly to PGCASD without reporting these incidents to Hyattsville personnel.

Currently, Hyattsville lacks a systematic method to become aware of actions taken by PGCASD regarding these violations. This lack of information includes PGCASD designations of animals as “dangerous” and PGCASD orders requiring animal quarantine or confinement.

Gaining access to PGCASD animal control software can help fill these gaps. This software will provide the City with data regarding the location of dogs identified as “dangerous” and allow the City to comply with annual reporting requirements. As such, Hyattsville shall obtain a “read-only” license from PGCASD to their animal control software system “Chameleon” within ninety (90) days of passage of this motion. (See “Background” for PGCASD’s offer to share Chameleon software with Hyattsville.)

Annual Report

By January 31st of each year, Hyattsville shall prepare an Annual Report including pertinent data from the previous calendar year. This report shall also be made available to the general public and be presented to Hyattsville’s Mayor and City Council.

At the Municipal and County level, this data shall include all “Public Nuisance” incidents (e.g., at-large dog incidents) and all “Public Threat” incidents. It will also include City and PGCASD actions taken in response to the violations, including but not limited to citations, animals reported by Hyattsville to PGCASD following “Public Threat” violations, an inventory of dogs identified as “Dangerous” by the County, and any animals under quarantine or confinement orders by the County. The report shall include all “Public Threat, Category 2” Public Safety Alerts issued. The report shall include a list of all “City Agents”, including the completed animal control training/orientation.

Summary Background:

Current regulations and enforcement of animal control issues in Hyattsville are unclear, haphazard, and have contributed to tragic outcomes for Hyattsville residents and companion animals. This amendment to Hyattsville Code Chapter 52 creates clear expectations for preventing and responding to animal aggression in Hyattsville and creates new protections to promote the humane treatment of companion animals.

In a meeting with Chief Rodney Taylor of the PGCASD on 11/13/2019, Mr. Taylor offered to provide Hyattsville with a “read only” software license for Chameleon, the software system that PGCASD uses to log its actions and record locations of confined and quarantined animals. Once obtained, this software will provide Hyattsville with valuable information regarding any confinement or quarantine orders that have been issued by PGCASD within City limits.

Much credit is owed to the Hyattsville group Residents United for Furry Friends (RUFF) for helping identify shortcomings in our existing code and researching and recommending improvements.

Next Steps:

The City Attorney, in consultation with Council Member Schaible, the Hyattsville Chief of Police, and the Hyattsville Director of Community and Economic Development, will review and edit (as needed) the ordinance for discussion and action by the Mayor and Council.

Fiscal Impact:

Following animal aggression incidents, there will be additional expectations to report and follow-up with PGCASD, but Hyattsville will still rely on PGCASD to adjudicate dog bites, and maintain the list of dangerous animals, quarantine orders, and confinement orders. Code enforcement responsibilities will be expanded modestly with clear expectations set regarding implementation of Chapter 52, and enforcement of the new rules regarding restrictions on tethering and exposure to severe weather.

City Administrator Comments:

Staff comments are provided in consultation with Police Department and Community & Economic Development staff. The marked-up version is included to provide the Council with ongoing discussion and additional context. While there may need to be ongoing discussion and coordination on the overall modifications, the staff can identify a contact number/email for dissemination to the community to capture animal control calls. The majority of incidents would continue to be handled by PGC Animal Control, but we can continue coordination to leverage PGC Animal Control data through GIS and create a report and mapping tool for animal control incidents. The captured data can include the City response to Chapter 52 incidents.

Community Engagement:

TBD

Strategic Goals:

Goal 3 - Promote a Safe and Vibrant Community

Legal Review Required?

Pending